

# † The INQUIRER

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Happy  
Christmas

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# The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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The Inquirer is the oldest  
Nonconformist religious newspaper

**"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."**

*From the Object passed at the  
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## Inquiring Words

### Christmas is many stories

Holly and Mistletoe, signs of life in midwinter.

The ancients saw the sun coming back in the sky. The Green Man  
is reborn.

In the Christmas Story, it is glory come to the poor.

Mary and Joseph are not rich people.

It is the beginning of a revolutionary prophecy:

The Kingdom of God is for peacemakers, for all races.

For those humble enough to see holiness in a child.

It is a story of civil disobedience.

Herod the king instructs the Wise Men to find the child and report  
back to him ...

They are warned in a dream not to return to Herod.

And they return to their home in Persia or Babylon without  
reporting to Herod.

It is a story of the wisdom of women:

"Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart."

— Richard Boeke

Photo by Kriss Szkurlatowski

## The Inquirer in 2013

It was with regret that the Inquirer Board voted to raise the cover and  
subscription prices for 2013. The budget was balanced. But postage increases  
have made it necessary to pass along the expense to subscribers. Therefore, in  
2013, single copies of *The Inquirer* will be £1. And, individual subscriptions  
will cost £35 annually. Board members have worked to keep expenses down.  
But two postage increases within the past year have made this move necessary.  
The board would like to thank all of *The Inquirer's* subscribers and supporters  
who help to keep our Unitarian flame lit.

— MC Burns

### With thanks

The colour cover on this issue of *The Inquirer* was sponsored by  
Neville and Betty Kenyon of the Bury Congregation, who would  
like to offer Season's Greetings to all their Unitarian friends.

The Inquirer will skip one issue during December and will return  
on 5 January.





## *The Moment of Magic*

Now is the moment of magic,  
when the whole, round earth turns again toward the sun,

and here's a blessing:  
the days will be longer and brighter now,  
even before the winter settles in to chill us.

Now is the moment of magic,  
when people beaten down and broken,  
with nothing left but misery and candles and their own clear voices,  
kindle tiny lights and whisper secret music,

and here's a blessing:  
the dark universe is suddenly illuminated by the lights of the menorah,  
suddenly ablaze with the lights of the kinara,  
and the whole world is glad and loud with winter singing.

Now is the moment of magic,  
when an eastern star beckons the ignorant toward an unknown goal,

and here's a blessing:  
they find nothing in the end but an ordinary baby,  
born at midnight, born in poverty, and the baby's cry, like bells ringing,  
makes people wonder as they wander through their lives,  
what human love might really look like,  
sound like,  
feel like.

Now is the moment of magic,

and here's a blessing:  
we already possess all the gifts we need;  
we've already received our presents:  
ears to hear music,  
eyes to behold lights,  
hands to build true peace on earth  
and to hold each other tight in love.



# 'Christmas Gorilla' brought light

By Linda Hart

The Christmas gorilla comes out every year and sits on the rocker along with a plush snowman, and a small pillow that says, 'Meet me under the mistletoe'. It is over 20 years old now, and the white of its fur has gone dingy with the years, the cheap polyester scarf is pilling, and the fringe on the end has gotten tattered. But still it comes out.

It was Gabriel who gave it to me and the crooked smile on the gorilla's face makes me think of him still. A lovely, sweet 3-year-old, his mother brought him to the child care centre where I was the director because the doctors helping him to heal recognised that he needed to socialise with children his own age, and his mother protected him too much. Her love was smothering him, and he needed some space in which to run free.

An accident with a drunk driver had done it to him. All the family had been injured, but little Gabriel, only 2 1/2, suffered a head injury and was in a coma for some months, and now was in rehabilitation. The doctor's report said that the prospect for getting better was good. Except that he needed some space, and we meant to give it to him.

He came three mornings a week. His long, thick hair was ever in his eyes. It grew long because at his bedside when he lay unconscious and his survival was in question, oddly enough, his mother in prayer had promised the Virgin Mother that she would not cut his hair for a year if he survived. So it grew out, covering the place where they had cut open his skull to relieve the pressure on his brain. We knew that there was a soft place on his head and that we needed to take care that he didn't bump there. One day, when he was calm, I felt around on his head and found the hole, on the side the size of a small cookie, and nearly as round.

He began to attend the centre in early autumn. Manju and Shirley were his main teachers, though I was in the classroom as well. He had no attention span. He would dart from one activity to the next, look at a book and fling it down, grab a few blocks and abandon them as another toy caught his eye – and off he would go again. One of us was always with him, trying to get him to stay for a moment more with a puzzle or with the Lego blocks. Nothing worked.

No matter the weather, we went outdoors each day. The children would get their coats and hats and scarves and bring them to the rug and put them on. Gabriel would dash about the classroom. I or one of the other teachers would grab his coat and lay it on the ground on its back, armholes open. This was an easy way for children to put on their coats. Hands in the arms, each would bring the coat over their heads and it would be on. 'Come put your coat on, Gabe,' we would call to him. And, eventually, one of us would take him by the hand, walk him over to the coat, thrust his hands into the sleeves and lift his arms up, hoping that one day he would do it on his own.

Outside, he loved to run. Only it was a lopsided sort of run.

*'Christmas is about so many things: the birth of a child, the saving of the world, hope in the darkness, light in the night. Christmas is about the gifts that we get, too, though of course, it is mostly about the gift of love that comes wrapped in the many packages.'*

Up on the toes of his right foot, he would galumph along, tottering on the brink of falling. The urge to run after him, arms stretched out in a protective bubble struck all of us at one time or another, but we restrained ourselves, knowing he needed to run; knowing that he didn't get to move like this at home.

At home time, I would pick up Gabe's coat and lay it out for him. 'Put your coat on, Gabe,' I would intone, more a chant or a ritual than an actual request. It was just how it worked. A few minutes later I would put his coat on him and we would walk through the halls of the school.

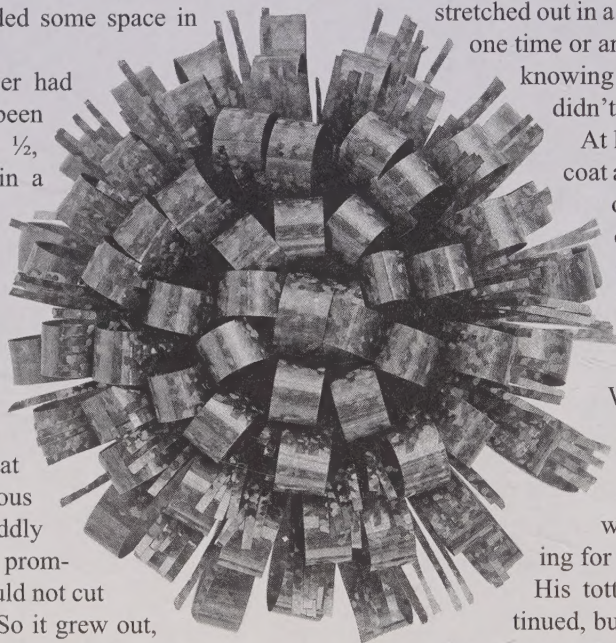
Weeks went by. Gabe's painting was the same sort of blur that he was – a quick swipe of red or blue or green across the paper and he would be on the move again, looking for something else to occupy his time. His tottering across the playground continued, but he seemed somehow surer on his feet, not as wobbly as those first few days.

Probably two months along, he began to slow down and to focus on a few tasks. He decorated a paper bag for Halloween goodies. Craft paper shapes were randomly slapped on the bag with too much glue. But it was something he had done mostly by himself. A real victory. Instead of dropping puzzles on the floor while passing the puzzle rack, they were dumped out at a table. Putting the pieces back wasn't really his concern, but sometimes he could manage one or two back into place.

One Monday morning near Christmas, Manju, one of the teachers, didn't arrive. Time passed and I worried, because she was never late. Distracted by the activities of the day, I went on, her absence an irritant in the background. Later on, the phone rang out in the hall. Manju's husband had called in to the main office. Over the weekend there had been an accident. While driving to the airport to drop off a family friend, a car, driven by a man with a blood alcohol level easily twice the legal limit, crossed the median strip and slammed into their car. Everyone had bumps and bruises, and some had broken bones. But Manju had been killed instantly. She would never be coming back to work.

In a fog, I went back into the classroom. Shirley immediately saw the stricken look on my face, and I whispered to her what had happened, my mind racing to sort out how to tell these 15 children that their teacher, beloved by all of them, would never

*(Continued on next page)*





# Keeping Christmas

Henry van Dyke

There is a better thing than the observance of Christmas day, and that is, keeping Christmas.

## Are you willing...?

- To forget what you have done for other people, and to remember what other people have done for you;
- To ignore what the world owes you, and to think what you owe the world;
- To put your rights in the background, and your duties in the middle distance, and your chances to do a little more than your duty in the foreground;
- To see that men and women are just as real as you are, and try to look behind their faces to their hearts, hungry for joy;
- To own up to the fact that probably the only good reason for your existence is not what you are going to get out of life, but what you are going to give to life;
- To close your book of complaints against the management of the universe, and look around you for a place where you can sow a few seeds of happiness.
- Are you willing to do these things even for a day? Then you can keep Christmas.

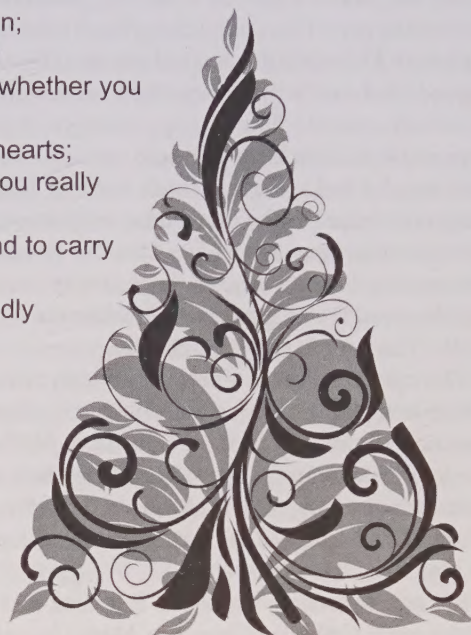
## Are you willing...?

- To stoop down and consider the needs and desires of little children;
- To remember the weakness and loneliness of people growing old;
- To stop asking how much your friends love you, and ask yourself whether you love them enough;
- To bear in mind the things that other people have to bear in their hearts;
- To try to understand what those who live in the same home with you really want, without waiting for them to tell you;
- To trim your lamp so that it will give more light and less smoke, and to carry it in front so that your shadow will fall behind you;
- To make a grave for your ugly thoughts, and a garden for your kindly feelings, with the gate open –

Are you willing to do these things, even for a day? Then you can keep Christmas.

And if you can keep it for a day, why not always?  
But you can never keep it alone.

*Submitted by the Rev Richard Boeke who notes that van Dyke was inspired by the last line of Dickens' A CHRISTMAS CAROL: "It was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God Bless Us, Every One!"*



Robert Proksa

## In the face of darkness, light comes

*(Continued from previous page)*  
be back.

Noting the time, I went and got Gabriel's coat. Tossing it down on the floor, I began the ritual chant, 'Gabe, come put your coat on.' Looking around at the children over on the rug quietly reading books, my heart felt broken. One of their voices lifted into the room.

'Miss Linda, look at Gabriel!'

His hands had slid into his sleeves; his arms were over his head as he shimmied into his puffy winter coat. A look of triumph was on his face as he tottered over to me to have me zip him up.

The other children all came to their feet and clapping for Gabriel, now steadier, now more attentive, now able to take care of himself better. We all cheered and gave him hugs, and I walked with him up to the bus feeling like some small measure of balance had been restored to the world. No life is a payment for another, nothing could take away the grief of Manju's death, but Gabe was more and more restored. Somehow life did carry on, did lift up through the sadness and loss. I received a shining gift on that day.

At Christmas, his mother brought me the Christmas gorilla, its round face not unlike Gabriel's. I have kept it as an ongoing reminder, so that each year at Christmas he would come back to me again, the picture of that tottering child, the picture of his arms upraised in victory.

Christmas is about so many things: the birth of a child, the saving of the world, hope in the darkness, light in the night. Christmas is about the gifts that we get, too, though of course, it is mostly about the gift of love that comes wrapped in the many packages. The Christmas gorilla represents them all: love and light, hope and promise. And he tells me, when I am quiet enough to listen, he tells me to remember it all:

that in the face of the darkness, light is possible;  
in the face of despair, hope can come;  
in the midst of sadness, a moment of promise might arrive;  
and that a new birth is ever awaiting,  
in unlikely places.

*The Rev Dr Linda Hart is former minister of Richmond and Putney Unitarian Church.*

*Bow photo by by Claudia Espinosa.*



# Little pigsty chapel honours unity

By Frank Walker

Twenty years ago in a moment of madness I acquired a semi-ruinous old farmhouse in the centre of France. It is 3000 feet up in the volcanic mountains of the High Auvergne. The air and water are pure, so it is a very healthy place. I have gradually been restoring it little by little, and am now able to spend two months of the year in this peaceful and beautiful setting.

There is a vast stone barn with magnificent rafters. It would make a lovely church, but the cost of doing so is far beyond my means. I let it to two ladies who keep there two big high-powered boats.

All the same, I had in mind the possibility of converting part of the outbuildings into a little chapel. At length I hit upon the two old pigsties. They have a good tiled roof which keeps them watertight, and a smooth concrete floor. Disappointingly, it proved impossible to knock the two into one, as I had first envisaged. I had to make do with just one. It made a very tiny chapel, more of a shrine or grotto, perhaps, holding no more than three people at a time. An involuntary obeisance on entering is necessary, as the doorway is so low. I cleaned out the interior and spray-painted white the domed ceiling and walls. The floor is partly carpeted.

The central object is a copy of an icon of the Madonna and Child from the church of St Alphonse in Rome. The picture came to me quite by chance, a gift from Michel, the owner of the local *brocante*, the second-hand furniture and junk shop. I suspect he came by it when he cleared the Presbytery after the death in his late 80s of the local priest. There are many candles to illuminate this tiny space.

My neighbours are impressed and think that my little chapel looks very Catholic. They see Mary, but ignore the other pictures. Actually, the place is an inter-faith Chapel of Unity and All Saints. The Madonna and Child is the most beautiful of all Christian images, and the most universal, representing as it does all humanity. That is why, rightly, it is given pride of place.

I also have pictures of the Buddha, of the Bodhisattva Manjusri from Java which I found in the National Gallery in Washington DC, and a photograph of a beautiful statue of Krishna that appeared in an exhibition of ancient Indian sculpture at the Royal Academy some years ago. Also there is the most lovely and meaningful icon of modern times which has quietly emerged as a symbol for all humankind, religious or not: a picture of our dear mother the Earth seen sailing through space like some beautiful blue pearl of greatest price. I would like to add a picture of the stars of the Milky Way, our own local galaxy, to indicate our position in the universe.

More saints of all religions and of none will be added in due course, including such Unitarian saints as Dorothea Dix, Florence Nightingale, Albert Schweitzer, Norbert Capek and Danilo Dolci. To sit in this tiny shrine, surrounded by the saints, is a simple heart-warming experience, for the saints are "increasers of goodness": it is not possible for us to be quite as mean as we naturally are when they have passed before us.

The image of Mother and Child is especially dear at this time of year. My own shrine's image is far from sentimental, though.



Frank Walker's Chapel of Unity and All Saints. Photo by Frank Walker.

The face of Jesus here is not that of a baby, but of a young man who gazes with steely determination into the future, as well he might, for above him fly two angels holding aloft instruments of the Passion, a spear and a chalice into which will drop blood from his wounded side. It is a symbolic reminder of suffering and of the victory over suffering.

Pictures of Mother and Child occur not only in Christian churches. They exist in ancient Egypt, in Greek and Roman temples, in China, Japan, India, Africa and South America: a world-wide image of life and love.

One of our own ancient chapels has an interesting story. During the Second World War it was bombed. All the interior was burnt out. Some of the walls remained standing, just a few feet high. It was only a shell. The congregation refused to give up. Brave and determined, inside the shell they installed a pre-fabricated hut where they continued to hold services and meetings. This was at Cross Street Chapel in Manchester. Now they have a lovely new building-in-the-round with everyone sitting in friendly circles.

One object from the past is especially interesting: a statue. At the time of destruction, one of the chapel's members was an artist and sculptor. When he saw one of the great blackened charred beams that had once been a rafter holding up the roof, he had an idea. He carved out of it a lovely statue of a mother and child.

People were astonished. "You've given us Mary and the baby Jesus," they said. "It could be," replied the artist, "but really it's meant to be any mother and child, every mother and child." He carved that statue as a sign of hope and new life that triumphs over death and destruction. It is a witness to the Universal Incarnation, and that is the deepest meaning of every Christmas image of Mary and her child. Nothing could be less sectarian, or more profoundly human, all-inclusive, all-embracing.

*For not alone on Christmas morn  
Was God made one with humankind:  
Each time a girl or boy is born  
Incarnate deity we find.*

*The Rev Frank Walker is minister emeritus of the  
Cambridge Unitarian Church.*



# Christ-myth is among great stories

By David Charles Doel

A friend of William Blake's asked the great English poet if he believed that Jesus was the son of God. "Yes," replied Blake, "But so am I. And so are you!" We are all sons and daughters – children – of God.

People frequently misuse the word 'myth' to mean something that is not true, whereas the great myths actually express profound and universal truths about us and our world (as Freud demonstrated in his exposition of the Greek myth of Oedipus). The Gospels offer us the most incredibly beautiful and profound myth of the life of Jesus, the man who became the Christ. The accounts of the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus present perhaps the greatest myth of all time.

The best-known teachers of prayer and spiritual growth the world over have told us how, on our spiritual journey, we need to pass through the dark nights of suffering and the sense of abandonment expressed on the cross by Jesus in his cry, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" DH Lawrence wrote how difficult it is for humans to change, since change necessarily involved "passing through the waters of oblivion". We have to give up our sense of a separate self, die to ourselves, and discover our primary, fundamental union with love and peace – and at this 'resurrection' discover the joy that lives at the very heart of our being, in the fundus of the soul, which is God within us.

Resurrection is described by Paul as an arousal or an awakening. Resurrection is a being 'raised' – egeiro – which means to be raised up, but also to awaken. Resurrection is also anastasis, a standing-up beyond one's self, a rising again. Resurrection involves an awakening and an arousal from one's old self, transformative of the person in relation both to one's self and to others. The act of surrender, of trusting commitment – faith – permits this transformation to occur, a transformation restoring (dikaios – tr. 'righteousness; basic meaning 'to restore') the individual to a living relationship with the inner creative powers of the psyche, captured in the archetypal image of the Christ.

The Gnostics, condemned as heretics, believed with Origen

that the resurrection was not a past event, unique to Jesus, which might be shared at the second coming, but that it symbolised an awakening – now to the presence of the Christ in the soul. The anonymous Gnostic text, – 'Treatise on Resurrection', addressed to Rheginos – explains that ordinary human existence is a form of spiritual death, but that resurrection is the moment of enlightenment: "It is the revealing of what truly exists ... and a transition (metabole) into newness". One may, he declares, be resurrected from the 'dead' here and now. Resurrection represents a transformation of consciousness arising out of deep suffering, a kind of crucifixion of spirit.

Theodotus, a second-century Gnostic teacher in Asia Minor, wrote that a Gnostic was one who had come to understand:

"who we were, and what we have become; where we were... whither we are hastening; from what we are being released; what birth is and what is rebirth."

To know one's self, at the very deepest level of our inner being, was, simultaneously, to know God – this was the secret of Gnosis.

One of the greatest of the Gnostic poets, Monoimus, wrote:

"Abandon search for God and the creation and other matters of a similar sort. Look for God by taking yourself as the starting point. Learn who it is within you who makes everything his own and says: 'My God, my mind, my soul, my body'. Learn the sources of sorrow, joy, love, hate... If you carefully investigate these matters you will find God in yourself."

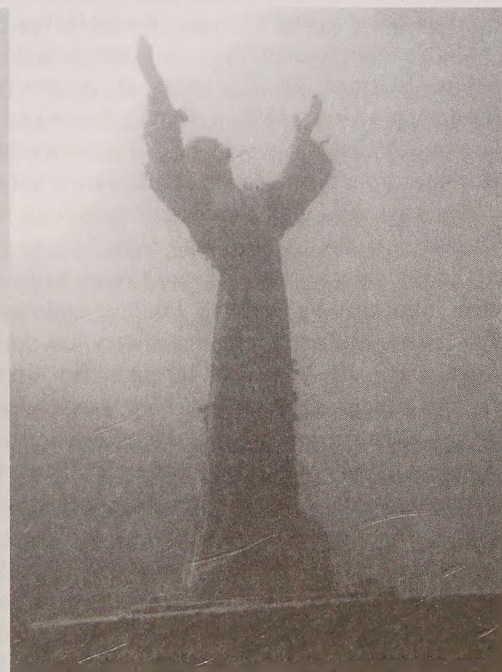
Like teachers of prayer the world over, and like modern depth psychologists, the Gnostic teachers saw the integration or maturation of the personality, the transformation of the soul, as a process depending upon our co-operation with inner, or unconscious, healing powers, associated with the work of the Holy Spirit and known as 'the life of Grace' in Christian contemplative theology.

The Christians in authority within the early church believed Jesus was the Son of God in a unique way, quite distinct from any other human being; a specially selected God/Man, whose sacrifice on the cross atoned for human sin – i.e. bought back

(Continued on next page)

*The Gospels offer us the most incredibly beautiful and profound myth of the life of Jesus, the man who became the Christ.*

*The accounts of the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus present perhaps the greatest myth of all time. The best-known teachers of prayer and spiritual growth the world over have told us how, on our spiritual journey, we need to pass through the dark nights of suffering and the sense of abandonment expressed on the cross by Jesus in his cry, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"*





We will light candles this Christmas,  
 Candles of joy despite all sadness  
 Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,  
 Candles of courage for fears ever present,  
 Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,  
 Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,  
 Candles of love to inspire all our living,  
 Candles that will burn all the year long.

– Howard Thurman  
 Photo by Dora Pete



## Christ is incarnate in all of us

*(Continued from previous page)*

our souls (redeemed us) from the devil. The Gnostics, however, emphasised like Unitarians today, the common humanity of Jesus. They believed, as Unitarians believe (following Martineau), that the Christ is incarnate in every human being. Jesus was one who became the Christ; “was filled with the Holy Spirit”, realising within himself the implications of the Christ as incarnate Logos – that inner Light which enlightens the souls of all folk everywhere.

According to the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, Jesus declared he was not the master of his disciples, but they could follow where he trod and know, in their own experience, the things he had discovered. In this Gospel, Jesus ridicules those who thought of the Kingdom of God in literal terms:

“Rather, the Kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will realise that you are the children of the living God. But if you will not know yourselves, then you will dwell in poverty, and it is you who are that poverty.”

Martineau, incidentally, was into demythologising long before Bultman. In *The Seat of Authority in Religion*, (Longman’s Green. 1898 – 4<sup>th</sup> ed.) for example, he declared how much easier it would be “to untwine the mythological attributes from the person of Jesus, were it not that the process of investing him with them had begun long before our New Testament books assumed their form.”

The Buddhist scholar, Edward Conze, believed the Gnostics were influenced by Buddhist teaching and there is a tradition that Jesus spent time in the monastery just outside Jerusalem, which was much influenced by Buddhism – a tradition which perhaps might explain the many examples of Buddhist stories and sayings in the Gospels. Buddhists teach that the ‘Diamond Body of the Buddha’ indwells every human soul, just as classical Christian teachers, such as St Augustine, believed the God or Christ image – representing the totality of our human and divine potentiality – lay at the fundus of every human soul. Augustine called this indwelling ‘image’ an archetype (meaning imprinted from the beginning). It is a fascinating parallel in the History of Ideas that the modern

psychologist, Carl G Jung used this same term ‘archetype’ of images appearing in dreams and visions, representing inherited human psychobiological potential. The image of the Christ or the Buddha, Jung believed, represented the inner Self, centre of unconsciousness, from which deep integrative or healing processes within the mind were derived.

The Logos doctrine emerged out of the synthesis of Greek and Eastern philosophy. The Vedanta of India also engages a concept of incarnation, the theory of Avatara, within a doctrine of the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Rhadakrishnan, in his commentary on the Bhagavadgita, wrote that God “with His creative ideas” (Logoi) is Brahma. God Who pours out Love is Vishnu, perpetually at work saving the world. And, “when the conceptual becomes the cosmic and when heaven is established on earth, we have the fulfilment represented by Shiva.” God, he says, is at the same time wisdom, love and perfection.

The three functions may not be torn apart. Yoga was the technique through which the Jivatmen (surface self) came to a knowledge of its union with the Paramatmen (deep unconscious, potential self) and with Brahma (the Ground and Root of Being).

Believing the incarnation is true universally of human souls and that Jesus is not uniquely the Child of God, allows Unitarians to view other religious leaders without condescension. Unitarians recognise Jesus of Nazareth as a great religious poet and teacher, but are able to recognise also the authority of other truly outstanding religious poets and teachers such as Siddhartha Guatama, the Buddha, and the Taoist sage, Lao Tzu. Unitarians may read the scriptures of other faiths, their poetry and teaching stories, as readily as the Bible – not as somewhat secondary or inferior writings, but as valid and significant in their own right. This makes for a genuine tolerance and understanding of other religious traditions, providing a milieu in which we may meet and engage with people of different faiths as equals, as brothers and sisters in search of truth; and not as rivals.

*The Rev David Charles Doel is a retired Unitarian minister.*



# Horses are among our best friends

By Paul Dawson

I have been around horses for nearly 30 years, animals that were introduced to my life early on by my mother and aunt with a passion for horses. Once or twice a month, I head for a small mountain in Snowdonia National Park where my horse lives with his herd. I count horses amongst my best friends. Their warm personalities, inquisitiveness, trust and loyalty make them true friends. They are non-judgmental – unless you forget an apple, or you stop scratching a really good spot.

About five years ago, I began competing in dressage, a French horse riding discipline. Gradually, I progressed from competitions within the riding school to competing at local contests among riding schools, to the regional-level – competing against the best riders in Yorkshire, North Lincolnshire, and Tyneside. Now I represent Yorkshire and the North East in national competitions. In 2010 I was a class winner at the National Riding for Disabled Dressage Competition, making me amongst the top 20 disabled riders in the UK.

I have a motor-nerve condition that is slowly sapping my use of my body and leaves me with near-constant pins and needles. I find my time with horses a great emotional release, as horses give brilliant hugs and are expert listeners when you feel down and need cheering up. Riding also provides freedom for me – physically, emotionally and spiritually.

I planned to defend my title in 2011. However, I broke my right thigh and the right side of my pelvis in a riding accident. I was told I should stop riding. But that made me more determined than ever to keep doing the sport I thrive on. Eighteen months after my accident, I am well on the way to recovery. Fate is far more important than fear or planning – ironically a saying of my late grandmother, who was also very horsey. The accident held up a powerful mirror and made me question myself and my relationship with horses. At such a watershed, I had two options: walk away from what I felt to be a core part of who I was, or be honest with myself, defy the doctors and do what felt right.

But how is any of this relevant to Unitarians?

How is riding a horse a spiritual act?

Dressage is an 'individual' sport. In one sense, that's true. There are no dressage teams. But a dressage rider is just one link in a chain of people all working to the same goal, the groom, the vet, the farrier, the instructor and trainer, all working to get the best from a horse and rider. But, for me dressage, like any equestrian pursuit is the ultimate expression of a team sport: horse and rider work towards the same goal. If the horse does not do its part, the team fails. If the rider does not do their part, the team fails. When things go well, the feeling is incredible. But when things go badly wrong, it means the chain, and aspects of the bond between horse and rider are broken. The horse can be a paradox, both gentle and deadly.

The unspoken bond between horse and rider is the key to success. They look to each other for guidance, reassurance, safety, confidence, love, reward, loyalty and – above all – trust. The relationship is unspoken, between the rider's and the



Paul Dawson and his horse, Duke.

horse's inner selves. It is a passionate relationship with highs and lows. I have experienced both – the high of winning at the national level, and the crushing low – quite literally – of serious injury.

To be able to fully trust your horse, you must be able to trust and love yourself. If you don't believe in yourself, love yourself or trust yourself enough, the horse will respond to that. Horses hold a mirror up to your soul in a way, revealing things that you, perhaps, did not realise. To understand a horse, you must firstly understand yourself.

I don't know what it is about horses that make them so endearing. Dogs may be 'man's best friend,' but the bond between horse and human seems to transcend simple friendship.

Horses are noble, and the connection between horse and rider is unique. Horses and humans work together, play together, compete together, fight together, and to live together in such remarkable harmony. Horses and humans have an ability to love each other in a tangible and meaningful way.

Horses are herd animals, and live in extended families. I am part of my horse's herd of 38 other horses. They, overall, live in harmony with each other and with their surroundings – here then is a lesson we can all learn. Horses are able to put aside their own differences and personalities and come together as a herd, as a team. Horses, like people, come in all shapes, sizes, colours and personalities – they don't judge each other upon their external appearance, but on who each other is. If only we humans were the same.

A relationship with a horse offers self improvement through physical, emotional and psychological growth. It encourages leadership skills, and offers spiritual awareness. Horses teach us that living in the moment can bring us peace, serenity and connection. I can recall many days of stress and complexity at work. Spending time with my horse, within his grace reminds me of the beauty of nature and what is truly important in life. After a normal day at work surrounded by ego struggles, gossip, irate clients and malfunctioning computers, being around a horse melts away the stress. In that moment, I am returned to a state of peace, being at one with nature. Being amongst horses reminds me that the stress I experience in society is not worth worrying about.

The horse is part of my existence. And, every day, horses return to me an appreciation of the simplicity of nature that, for me at least, represents a love and respect of life – a deeper connection to the essence of the divine in all things.

If we are to love one another, first we have to know who we are and love ourselves for who we are, before we can love another entity with purity and sincerity. Love is exemplified as devotion, as steady, consistent commitment between two loving entities be they man and horse, women and dog, or man and women, father and son, wife and husband. That then is a message worth living out every moment of our lives. 1 John 38 tells us: Let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

*Paul Dawson is a member of Westgate Chapel, Wakefield.*



# How should Unitarians mark Advent?

By Bridget Spain

For Christians, Advent marks the beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year. It is a time of expectation and anticipation, a time of spiritual preparation. At Christmas, Christians celebrate the historic birth of Jesus and at the same time look in anticipation to the second coming of Christ in his Glory at the end of days when, as the creed says, he will judge the living and the dead.

Advent is observed by both the eastern and western Christian churches. But they emphasise different aspects of church tradition. The eastern churches prioritise prayer and fasting; a kind of spring clean for the soul in preparation for Christmas. Western Christianity incorporates liturgy readings that stress a sense of anticipation. The western Christian church shows its pragmatism; they realise fasting will never sit comfortably in a culture that celebrates Christmas by consuming large amounts of food and drink. When Christmas revellers meet up to celebrate, the last thing they want to share is penitential food.

But what does Advent mean for the Unitarian Church, rooted Christianity? Unitarians, of course, are the ultimate party people – prayer and fasting not our strong suit. Do we ignore Advent, cut straight to the celebrations? Is it the usual case of choose the parts that suit us – the easy parts – and leave the rest? We love our carols. We even manage to sing the very un-Unitarian ones. And we celebrate with enthusiasm.

But if we're honest, we can find ourselves pausing during the shopping melee. We wonder if preparing for Christmas should involve more than shopping, cooking and present wrapping. There are times when we are immersed in the world of material things. Yet even above the commercial din, one can hear the soul call with a reminder that it, too, needs nourishment. The season of Christmas is a celebration. Yet at this – the darkest time of the year – we can begin to feel the strong connection between the natural world and our own human nature.

In the Celtic tradition; religion closely followed nature. Our ancestors' close observation of nature enabled them to build the Tumulus at Newgrange, a Stone Age tomb in County Meath. Newgrange is testament to the human spirit's need to mark the Winter Solstice. Their calculations were so accurate that the sun floods the deeply recessed chamber with beautiful golden sunlight at the Winter Solstice.

In Celtic spirituality, winter was the time to cultivate wisdom. A time to rest from physical work, winter was the time to give attention to the soul. Between storms, winter has quiet days; we sense a stillness and a silence in nature. Even the birds are silent. The stillness of winter is more noticeable when snow falls to the ground. It's as if nature holds its breath as we approach the Solstice. The days are so short and cold that it seems all growth has stopped. This is holiday time for the gardener.



*Mary's silence is noteworthy. She has never made a theological statement; she opened her heart to life; she took a risk for living; she fulfilled her destiny. Photo by Bill Davenport*

Nature gives the impression that everything is dead or in a deep sleep; we perceive nature as idle, waiting for spring days to come. But that is just an impression – and an incorrect one at that. Unobserved by us, nature is busy with the essential task of converting the dead material of last season into nutrients to nourish new growth. In winter, worms draw dead leaves down into the soil. They digest the leaves and what seemed dead and worthless becomes the mulch that enriches the soil. It is carried out in silence, without ever ruffling the surface clay. It takes time for leaves to metamorphose from brittle death to living nourishment for the soil. Most worthwhile things take time. Frost also contributes. Frost breaks open the soil, allowing air to permeate the clay. All of this work is done in silence.

In the stillness of nature we discern a way of nourishing our soul. So, perhaps, instead of prayer or fasting, we should imitate nature and spend time in quiet reflective stillness; just doing nothing. Silent time is the perfect way to allow our innate wisdom to grow to maturity.

It sounds easy doesn't it? Just sit still, be quiet, with just yourself for company. No radio, no music, no TV, no book. This is when we get ants in our pants; we remember something that demands our attention. Most of us find it difficult being in our own company. If we sit in solitude, how well do we know the person we are sitting with? Do we really know the personality behind the façade?

Spending time in solitude is a good spiritual practice and there is no reason to restrict it to winter. Yet it is an ideal time to sift through our experiences and see what wisdom can be gleaned from the dying year. We remember happy and sad times; days of ordinariness and days of special significance. Resist putting a label the experiences. Don't judge them as good or bad. Their value lies in what we take from them. Every experience can cause us to become bitter and inward looking,

*(Continued on next page)*



# What about all this effin' and blindin'?

I am sure you have noticed how often people in the street, in films, on television use 'God' and 'Jesus' or 'Jesus Christ' as an epithet. These people do not believe in God/god or Jesus and sometimes, publicly and profanely, abuse those people who do. We, the Christian/Free Christians have allowed the name of our god and our leader/mentor/teacher to become the acceptable face of profanity. Children and people too polite to say \*\*\*\* or \*\*\*\* or \*\*\*\* say 'God' and 'Jesus' or 'Jesus Christ'. They do not say 'Mohammed' or 'Allah' or 'Buddha'. There are possibly two reasons for this, phonetically, 'God', 'Jesus' and 'Jesus Christ' are more appealing to say, also Christian missionaries have carried 'God', 'Jesus' and 'Jesus Christ' to the far ends of the earth.

Do we care? Are we content to let the core of our belief be treated as an alternative to \*\*\*\* or \*\*\*\* or \*\*\*\*? Do we think the speaking out against this will make us seem (heaven forbid) illiberal? Or are we too timid to speak out? I can see that we would not want to follow the actions of some of the Muslims who responded energetically to the portrayal of Mohammed in a Danish newspaper. I am really not suggesting firebombing. I am merely asking: Is this worth consideration? Or am I just being an old grump?

I am a bit of a wimp so when someone calls on 'God', 'Jesus' or 'Jesus Christ' in my presence rather than hitting them with the full diatribe:

'How dare you call on the name of the sacred which, if you were a believer, you would know was forbidden?\*' How dare you insult the followers of a faith in which you do not believe? Would you insult Muslims, Jews, Buddhists or Hindus in the same way or is it purely for Christians you retain your utter contempt?' I am more likely to say: 'God', 'Jesus' or 'Jesus



Christ' is busy right now, can I help?' which normally gets the response 'UHHH?'

\* Yes I know this isn't the Unitarian view but it is the view of quite a lot of Christians.

People in the media/public eye do also take swipes at religion generally. If they want to know how to do it properly they should read 'Lament for a Believer in Exile' from John Shelby Spong's book 'Jesus for the Non-Religious'. Should we be responding to this as well? I do not have a successful track record with complaints to the media. I do not think I have ever had a reply. But then I am just one voice.

I am not suggesting a Mary Whitehouse-style campaign. What I am advocating is a discussion. Do we care? Do we think that the swearing and down-putting has an adverse effect on us and other religious groups? Is it a form of discrimination? If it is, what can we do? What should we do to persuade people not to do these things?

Do you feel a circle service coming on?

At Upper Pocklington we hoist our bosoms and tut. What more can anyone do? Neither Flo nor Jo took the name of the Lord in vain. But then, what can you expect of non-Unitarians?

*Dorothy Houghton is a worship leader in the Midlands.*

## Meet the Christmas chaos with stillness

*(Continued from previous page)*

or we can use it to learn, grow and enrich the soul.

If the experience brings an unhappy memory, don't shrink from the sadness. This is not an invitation to wallow in misery; it is a call to be honest about life. It is accepting life's imperfection; learning a lesson and moving forward.

Advent is the time for Christmas cards and one of the enduring motifs on Christmas cards is the image of Mary, the mother of Jesus. With the caveat that bible stories' truth lies in their poetry, Mary's life is an example of someone who reflected in silence. She is revered by Christians, especially in the Roman Catholic Church. She is portrayed in many different guises. Our Lady of Lourdes, Fatima, Knock, etc. Despite her many manifestations and her central role in the Christian story she remains an enigma. Her role is central to the story of Christmas. Her pregnancy was announced by an Angel. Mary responded to the prospect motherhood with a positive attitude; she was open to taking a risk and to new life. The shepherds told her angels had announced the birth of her son; that her son would be a saviour. Kings came to offer homage to her child. They followed a star to find the one who would be king of the Jews.

When she was told all the other things concerning her son's future; that he would be a saviour or a king, her reaction was to keep those things in her heart and ponder them. Her silence is noteworthy. She has never made a theological statement; she

opened her heart to life; she took a risk for living; she fulfilled her destiny and I expect that when she pondered all those things in her heart that she hoped, she dreamed, she worried. She wondered what it would all mean. Through it all she kept her silence; and I believe that it is her silence that still draws ordinary people to a special relationship with her.



*Bridget Spain*

If religion has any value it must present us with an honest version of life, a vision that encourages us to be the best we can be – to live fully and live well. Real religion reminds us that we have responsibility for the state of our world. It is my duty to do what I can to make the world a better place; it is my duty to help others. So rather than praying, fasting or reading worthy books, take time to sit and be still, don't talk to God, don't make plans, don't look for answers, simply be silent, listen and reflect.

*The Rev Bridget Spain is minister of the Dublin Unitarian Church.*





Photo by J Peltier

## *Hell is a place where nothing connects*

By Danny Crosby

There is no greater ache than the loneliness of no longer being touched by life, this is hell. Hell is a place where nothing connects; therefore surely Heaven must be a place where everything connects. It was TS Elliot who claimed that "Hell is a place where nothing connects" and that "Hell is oneself," John Paul Sartre replied to this by saying that no, "Hell is other people." The truth is that to some extent they are both correct. Hell, at least on earth, can often be oneself and it can be other people too.

Elliot believed that it was self absorption and self protection that caused people to feel separate and alone. So many of us have highly developed self awareness and yet we still feel cut off from life. Are we too self-absorbed? Do we suffer because we live over examined and yet under connected lives? Have we become lost in ourselves?

I believe there is truth in this, although it is not the whole truth. Perhaps some people feel cut off and alone because they are too focused on the faults in others. How often do we hear folk blaming others for all of their problems? This builds barriers and creates loneliness and cuts people off from one another. Yes, hell can be ourselves and, yes, it can be other people too.

For many years of my life I felt disconnected, cut off, lost and lonely. I felt like I was living in hell. I saw hell as myself and I also saw it as other people too. From a young age I learnt to protect myself from life, from pain. Of course I failed utterly in my attempts to do so, all I succeeded in achieving, eventually, was to cut myself off from any joy and I actually experienced a deeper more ingrained suffering, what I have heard described as "the suffering within the suffering".

I have learnt that Heaven and Hell, at least here on earth, are two sides of the same coin. They possess similar charac-

teristics, although there is one important difference, how they are experienced. How we respond to suffering illustrates this perfectly. Two people can go through the same difficulties in life and yet they will often react to them very differently. For one it may well be described as a living hell and yet for the other they may well claim that they have had a taste of heaven as they walked through their troubles.

Suffering can cause division within ourselves and others either through self pity, or embarrassment or through the sense that life is treating us unfairly, that fate is singling us out. That said, the very same experience of suffering can also unite us through a deeper shared sense of compassion and empathy. Suffering can lead us to feel as though we have been cast into hell and yet through it we can also get a taste of heaven. Or, as Forrest Church put it, "At times of trouble, alone we are often lost. But by reaching out to and for others we entertain the possibility of redemption." In our suffering we can build up walls of self protection and yet at the same time this same suffering can foster compassion within us.

The fostering of compassion is I believe the purpose of religious community. By developing our compassion we can create heaven in our own lifetimes; by not fleeing from suffering, our own, or that of others, we can show to one another that in times of trouble we are not alone, we are not lost. By reaching out both to and for others we get a taste of heaven.

Karen Armstrong says "religion isn't about believing things. It's ethical alchemy. It's about behaving in a way that changes you, that gives you intimations of holiness and sacredness." For me these intimations of holiness and sacredness is what connection is all about.

Heaven is a place where everything connects.

*The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Urmston and Altrincham.*



# Reps met in 'Sacred Conversation'

By Kate Taylor

There is a type of Renaissance history painting termed 'sacred conversation'. It features a warm, intimate, and relatively relaxed grouping of figures round the Virgin and Child. It embodies reverence and hope.

On a crisp, sunny Saturday afternoon in November, some 30 representatives of eight District Associations from England, Scotland, and Wales, meeting at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, together with members of the Executive Committee, GA President Lis Dyson-Jones, and Chief Executive Derek McAuley, were urged to engage in sacred conversation with hope for the Movement at its heart.

So no confrontation – despite some disenchantment with our present governance arrangements – no shaking the earth, just tightly focused discussions on some of the fundamental issues facing the General Assembly and its member districts and congregations.

We were hugely fortunate in having an excellent facilitator. The firm and genial Simon Wilson, of Wilson Sherriff Associates, Matlock Bath, structured the three-hour meeting hugely efficiently, set us the key questions, and generated an atmosphere of friendly dialogue.

We worked in groups of nine or 10, each with its own questions. These were on whether the priorities agreed by the Executive Committee on 18 September 2010 are adequate and how we are to achieve them, on the role of the districts and communication between them and the Executive Committee, on the means of making our governance arrangements work more effectively, on the means of deepening spirituality in congregations and the possible role in this of districts, and on finding the right focus for our training activities. There was a further question, not initially set out but massively important (and largely unanswered): what is the 'product' we have on offer and what would encourage the 'customer' to buy it.

Lis Dyson Jones, Derek McAuley, and the present members of the EC simply merged with everyone else in one or other of the groups.

In terms of communication, it was said that we just don't feel connected. We need to re-forge the broken links among congregations, districts and the Executive Committee. It was suggested that for an experimental period, representatives of District Associations should meet together perhaps once or twice a year, and that the Executive Committee should make much more use of *The Inquirer* and *The Unitarian*. We needed to make Unitarianism much better known in the wider community.

Perhaps we could focus on a single issue where our voice is distinctive – pressure to legalise assisted suicide was sug-



*One of the groups engaged in earnest discussion at the meeting of representatives held at Cross Street Chapel. Photo by Kate Taylor*

gested – and to flag that up. But then – always the glorious flaw within Unitarianism – how could we be sure we were speaking for everyone in the Movement. Should we rather give voice to our spirituality and celebrate it more extensively? We must make our values clear at a local level as well as at a national one.

We talked about Vision. It was said that we should build from the 'bottom up', listening to the grass roots rather than just accepting the seeds yielded from the flower-head. We should scrutinise our voting system. We should do more, too, to publicise and share 'best practice'.

Of course we talked about money and whether a culture could develop in which those congregations with substantial capital reserves could assist impoverished ones. Importantly we urged that Unitarians should become much more generous in terms of live giving. (Quakers expect rather more from their members than we do.) We felt that we should ensure that we spend what money we have wisely. Were we inclined to squander it? Do we give anything like adequate support to failing congregations? And there was an associated issue – do we, across the Movement, have adequate project-management skills? Perhaps we need a database of the skills we possess.

Recruitment was an issue. Open days were proposed. There should be more focused advertising. But then do we understand how to welcome newcomers without overwhelming them? And are we genuinely inclusive?

We emphasised the importance of Ministry and of providing far more support for our colleges. We wanted a much closer relationship between ministerial and lay training.

Nothing was resolved. It was not that sort of occasion. Simon asked us, at the conclusion, whether there were issues still nagging us. Of course there were, even if we had little time to say so. Perhaps the major ones – vision, communication, growth – had been touched on. One, who had travelled a considerable distance, admitted being disappointed. But Renaissance sacred conversations are no more than tableau, reflecting a moment in time. It was what came after those encounters that changed the world. It is what follows from our own sacred conversation that will matter.

*Kate Taylor was one of the representatives of the Yorkshire Unitarian Union and is a member at Wakefield.*

## 2010 EC Strategic Priorities

To benefit our communities by:

- Encouraging and supporting leadership at local level
- Developing Ministry within the denomination
- Raising the visibility of the Unitarian movement
- Improving the services to the movement by staff and volunteers



# Send a Child to Hucklow Fund Target passed!

By Peter Godfrey

Two years ago a generous Trust said that if the Send a Child to Hucklow Fund raised £50,000 in its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year the Trust would double that sum. This was a big challenge as we usually raise about £25,000 to £30,000.

Thanks to the extremely generous giving by many individuals and numerous trusts and charities, and *The Inquirer* and its readers, we raised the large sum of £82,000. For the first time for a long time we have raised more than we spent on holidays. With the addition of the Trust's £50,000, spread over the next three years, we shall be able to add to our capital and increase interest from it. The trustees of the fund very much want to keep the momentum of this special year going and so have set a target of £50,000. It is particularly pleasing that the Women's League has the fund as its special appeal for 2012/3 – thank you, ladies.

The Fund provided twelve holidays in 2012. Children came from Mansfield, Nottingham, Manchester, Stalybridge, Towcester, Birmingham, Wigan, Hull and Liverpool (four groups). Generous donations came from the Dagny Raymond Charitable Trust, Mr and Mrs AER Goulty Charitable trust, Annesley (CLW) Trust, Simply Health, Broxtowe Masonic Lodge, Mansfield Rotary, Fellowship Theatre Company, Joseph and Anne Slater Memorial Fund, Leonard Chamberlain Trust, JH Blake Charity, M Dureen Trust, Magdalen Hospital Trust, The Toy Trust, Zochonis Charitable Trust, Provincial Grand Lodge of Nottinghamshire, BDO Charitable Trust, Clydesdale and Yorkshire Bank Foundation, Worshipful Company of Chartered Secretaries, Manchester Rotary, The

Skelton Bounty, The Hollis Trust, David Edwards Insurance, Elizabeth Heath Charity, The Nottingham Conclave Masonic Order, The Gorse Bank Trust, The EL Rathbone Trust, and Skipton Building Society.

We received a legacy of £20,000 from the estates of the late Margaret Hamer and Ivy Meadows. Gifts can now be made very easily via our website: [www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk](http://www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk). During 2010-11 gifts were received in memory of Hilton Birtles, Robin Boyes, Kenneth Brooks, Agnes Edwards (née Tittle), Mary Wilson Graham, Anne Gray (née Forshaw), Margaret Hamer, Joanne Lee Marston-Howard, Jean Mason, P Mills, Simon Phillips, Leonard Price, Roy Smith, and Joan Wylie. These gifts total £2,947, and this amount has been added to the *in memoriam* Capital Account.

Total expenditure was £67,334 of which £65,609 was spent on the children's holidays and £1725 (less than 3%) on administration and publicity.

Comments from the children included "... Terrific...Very, very good...an experience...life-changing...cool...awesome" \*\*\* "...I liked goin' out with Jack I did enjoy it very much."

A leader of one of the holidays wrote: "...I cannot emphasise enough what a fantastic experience the Hucklow visit is for our vulnerable children" \*\*\* "one [parent] has commented that since the visit their child is so much more confident, has been talking much more and showing affection, after a very difficult period at home..."

Very many thanks to the fund's many supporters. Your support for the 2013 holidays will be deeply appreciated.

*Peter B Godfrey is chairman of the SACH Trust.*

## The Send a Child to Hucklow Fund

### We did it!

### Challenged to raise £50,000, you helped us to raise £82,000

**Very, very many thanks.** There were twelve holidays in 2012. As ever, the children's descriptions of what the holidays meant to them are deeply moving. **hank you for helping to make these holidays possible. The work goes on, so do please help us to continue giving needy children a country holiday.**

Your gifts for the 2013 holidays will be as deeply appreciated as ever. **Our target is £50,000 for direct donations. It costs approximately £250 per child and we hope to send two hundred children.**

Gifts will be gratefully received by the Hon. Assistant Treasurer, Mrs Sue Cooper, 16 Woodlands Drive, Beverley, HU17 8BZ. Please note that the Fund can reclaim income tax paid by any individual (as long as s/he has paid income tax) if a Gift Aid Donation form has been signed. This is now a vital part of the fund's income. Please help in this way if you can. A copy of this form is with this issue of *The Inquirer*, or may be obtained from Mrs Cooper. Giving with a Gift Aid Donation form makes a gift of £20 worth £25.65 to the Fund. Gifts may now be made very easily on line, by going to our website: [www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk](http://www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk)

The Fund is a registered charity number 271585. All gifts are used for the holidays except for gifts in memory of someone that are put into a Capital Account and the interest is used for holidays. Please remember the Fund in your will. Legacies are a much appreciated and valuable income.

Copies of the full 2011-12 report and 2013 appeal may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, Rev Ernest Baker, 145 Tullibardine Road, Sheffield, South Yorks., S11 7GN, telephone 0114 266 1070.



# SACH has a great year 90th birthday surprise for IoW Unitarian



One group of Send-a-Child-to-Hucklow youngsters enjoyed a sunny hike. The charity had a very successful year. (See story, left.) Photo by Ernest Baker

## Motions workshop planned for January

A motions workshop with the General Assembly (GA) meetings steering group will be held on Monday 14 January 11am to 4pm at St Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, York, YO1 8NQ.

If your congregation, district or association is planning to put a motion at the GA Annual Meetings 2013 this is your opportunity to meet with the Steering Group to help you clarify your thinking and wording before submitting the motion to Andrew Mason at Essex Hall. If you plan to come please let Dawn Buckle know by email [dawnbuckle@ymail.com](mailto:dawnbuckle@ymail.com) or phone 01457 763 721 by 7 January.

— Dawn Buckle

## BUYAN Event: Social Action and Activism

The British Unitarian Young Adult Network (BUYAN) is a group for Unitarians aged between 18 and 35. We hope to find fellowship, friendship and support from others in the Unitarian network. Our next event will be held on 19 January, 11.30am to 5pm at Birmingham Unitarian New Meeting.

The theme will be social action and activism. We are going to consider any social action projects. Bursaries will be available for the travel expenses of anyone who would otherwise be unable to attend. We will be asking for a small donation of £5 towards the cost of a light lunch and other expenses from those who can afford to contribute.

For more information, contact the group on [contactbuyan@gmail.com](mailto:contactbuyan@gmail.com) or see our Facebook page BUYAN (Unitarians 18-35)



Unitarian Chief Officer Derek McAuley (r) with the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace and Harry Shukla MBE. The event was held to celebrate Inter Faith Week, mark the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Inter Faith Network and to mark the Archbishop's contribution to inter-faith relations. Photo by Paresh Solanki

## 90th birthday surprise for IoW Unitarian

Barbara Jones' name is synonymous with that of the Unitarian Meeting House at Newport on the Isle of Wight. Barbara celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday on 26 November and was delighted to receive a visit from the General Assembly President Lis Dyson-Jones. Lis said: "I was glad to be able to surprise Barbara with a visit on her special day. It is always important to recognise those who have served our movement well."

Barbara found Unitarianism when she was about 43 years old and she says she knew right away that she had found the right place for her spiritual life. In those early days she was greatly helped by the ministry of the Rev Derek Stirman.

She has held office at Newport for many years and only handed over the chair of the congregation a few years ago; she remains a Trustee. Nationally she has been a member of the General Assembly Council, former governing body of the movement, and felt honoured to be a member of the Ministry Committee. She has been delighted to share in the annual Experience weeks at Great Hucklow and she proudly recalls that she has attended every year since the early 1980s.

Barbara wasn't well enough to make the journey across the water to Portsmouth on the Sunday before her birthday. However the congregation there is eager to make her the fourth member of their 'nonagenarian club' and celebrate her contribution to Unitarianism.



Unitarian General Assembly President Lis Dyson-Jones (left) enjoyed a visit with Barbara Jones and her cat Harvey at her home on the Isle of Wight. Photo by Martin Whitell

In her working life Barbara was a school secretary and later a social worker in mental health working around the IoW.

The Meeting House at Newport has recently undergone considerable refurbishment, the two Victorian stained glass windows being rebuilt with the help of a grant from the Gregson Trust and the building Trustees have paid for the Meeting House and School Hall to be completely redecorated. Newport also received one of the last grants from the Millennium fund towards a new Notice board.

Isle of Wight Unitarians have a significant Earth/Spirit and Multifaith interest these days, in keeping with life on the island, but the Unitarian emphasis is strongly upheld by people like Barbara.

Services are held on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays of each month and a welcome awaits visitors.

— Martin Whitell



# Moved

By Andy Phillips

You ask me whether I've ever been moved by the baby Jesus.

Well I've held a newborn baby  
And felt the grace and astonishment of potential, and screaming  
need

And I've looked into the eyes of a child  
Pools of innocence and wonder  
And wondered where I mislaid mine

Have I ever been moved by the baby Jesus?

I've sat in the quiet to train myself  
To look at the world anew  
And tried to shed the phrase "born again"  
Of its dogma and doctrine  
Reclaiming it for fresh eyed truth  
Though it's still but through a glass, darkly

Have I ever been moved by the baby Jesus?

I've heard carols almost celestial, over the radio  
On crisp white Christmas Eves  
And felt my spine tingle to Handel's refrain  
"Unto us a son is given"

Even as I've crossed my mental fingers, quibbling at the  
theology

Have I ever been moved by the baby Jesus?

I've ranted and raved about festive consumerism  
Hailed the man himself with the moneylenders' tables  
And I've railed at the mawkish sentimentality of it all  
And those little Lapland lies  
And known I am right, whilst still also somehow missing the  
point

Have I ever been moved by the baby Jesus?

I've seen pictures of suffering kids on the TV  
Reached into my pockets like millions of others  
I'm sure the starving still don't know it's Christmas  
And I've felt guilty and empty by the inadequacy of my response

Have I ever been moved by the baby Jesus?

I've heard the tale of the Christmas truce  
Football, cigarettes, joviality  
In No Man's land  
Lads barely grown  
Didn't want to fight, didn't want to die  
A brief chink of light through tragedy's dark cloud  
And something about its earthiness and futility  
Conjures up those bleak words  
"In this world of pain"<sup>1</sup>

And the knowing that every Christmas has its Friday  
reckoning

And suddenly I am touched

More than by all the Power, Glory, Angels, Archangels and  
whole company of heaven

And then by all the gentle Jesus, meek and mild  
That unbelievable non-crying child

So, you ask me again, whether I've ever been moved by  
baby Jesus.

Well, I've seen too many dolls to not tell you straight:

It doesn't go in through my front door

There really isn't any room at the inn

But I think there's still a stable round the back of my heart I  
put him in.

<sup>1</sup> Referring to the words of the modified version of *In the Bleak  
Midwinter* found in *Hymns for Living* no. 87 (additions by J. H. Stannard)

Andrew Stannard

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